

**STATEMENT OF
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COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
MOTORCYCLE SAFETY FORUM
SEPTEMBER 12, 2006**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Board, I applaud the National Transportation Safety Board, and Board Member Deborah Hersman in particular, for spearheading this forum to examine the challenges and solutions surrounding motorcycle safety. Motorcycle fatalities have been increasing every year since 1997, and motorcycle injuries have been increasing since 1998. While motorcycle registrations have also been on the rise, the rate of increase in rider fatalities has far outpaced the rate of increase in motorcycle registrations.

Compared to 1997, 2005 data show a 115 percent increase in motorcycle fatalities, from 2,116 riders in 1997 to 4,553 in 2005. The alarming increases in motorcycle deaths show no signs of abating. Motorcycle fatalities rose 13 percent in 2005, from 4,028 in 2004 to 4,553. Almost one-half of the people who died were not wearing a helmet. The number of injured motorcycle riders also increased by 14 percent. In 2004, 76,000 motorcycle riders were injured, compared with 87,000 in 2005. Motorcyclists are about 34 times more likely than passenger car occupants to die in traffic crashes and eight times more likely to be injured.

Clearly the data indicates that our nation must do more to identify and implement proven safety countermeasures that will prevent motorcycle crashes, fatalities, and injuries. To make progress in motorcycle safety, we must better understand the facts surrounding motorcycle crashes. We must ask ourselves which safety countermeasures have been effective, which are cost-effective, and which are not currently being utilized that should.

This much we know: it is important to encourage motorcyclists to get proper training and licensing, wear protective gear, and never ride impaired. We also must heighten the awareness of all motorists as to how to share the road safely with motorcycles. There is no doubt that these preventive measures would go a long way toward saving lives.

Ensuring that all motorcycle operators are properly trained and licensed is critical. Motorcycle rider training programs continue to have difficulty meeting increased demand. Forty-seven states have legislated rider education and training

programs, yet many riders report having to wait for several months before they are able to enroll and complete a course. In 2004, 25 percent of motorcycle drivers killed in traffic crashes were not licensed or were improperly licensed to operate a motorcycle. Licensing is the only way State agencies have to ensure minimum knowledge and skills needed to operate a motorcycle.

One of the main reasons that motorcyclists are killed more frequently in crashes is that, unlike passenger cars, the motorcycle itself provides very little protection in a crash. The use of a helmet which complies with Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard Number 218 lowers the fatality and injury rates of motorcyclists. According to the National Highway Traffic Administration (NHTSA), helmets are estimated to be 37 percent effective in preventing fatal injuries to motorcyclists. I look forward to hearing about other types of promising protective gear from today's forum panelists.

Alcohol is also a major contributing factor to motorcycle crashes and the resulting fatalities and injuries. The alcohol-related motorcycle fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles traveled (VMT) is 220 percent above the overall U.S. alcohol-related fatality rate (2.31 per 100 million VMT versus 0.51). In 2005, the number of motorcycle riders killed in alcohol-related crashes increased by 10 percent. In 2004, 1,590 motorcyclists were killed in alcohol-related crashes, while 1,751 were killed in alcohol-related crashes in 2005.

The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), contains a number of provisions aimed at reducing motorcycle crashes, fatalities, and injuries. Specifically, SAFETEA-LU:

- Authorizes a new \$25 million incentive grant program, administered by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), to reduce the number of crashes involving motorcycles. These grant funds will support critically-needed motorcycle safety training and awareness programs.
- Directs NHTSA to conduct a study on reducing crashes involving impaired motorcyclists;
- Directs NHTSA to develop and provide model language to States for educational programs instructing other motorists how to share the road with motorcyclists;
- Provides \$2.8 million to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to conduct a comprehensive motorcycle crash causation study; and

- Establishes a Motorcyclist Advisory Council to coordinate with and advise FHWA on infrastructure issues of concern to motorcyclists, including road and barrier design, and construction and maintenance practices.

Sound implementation of these provisions and continued efforts to understand the problems and solutions surrounding motorcycle safety will be critical to our nation's efforts to stem the tide of motorcycle fatalities and injuries.

I commend the NTSB for focusing on this important topic, and look forward to working with the Board to determine the best possible solutions to protecting motorcyclists on our roads.